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ABSTRACT

Since 1974, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges has investigated the curricula, students, faculty, and institutional practices related to the collegiate function in community colleges. Recent activities have focused on advancing the liberal arts and facilitating student transfer to four-year colleges and chosen occupations. For example, the Center has conducted a series of faculty surveys to determine teachers' backgrounds, attitudes, and instructional practices; curriculum analyses comparing liberal arts and other courses; and case studies at 20 colleges throughout the country. During 1982-83, the Center has undertaken a project, involving six urban community colleges, which has attempted to promote exemplary practices, stimulate dialogue and communication, disseminate information, and provide forums for the exchange of ideas regarding the liberal arts. As part of this project, the Center has organized and helped to conduct a series of workshops in the participating districts. These workshops have or will focus on: (1) ways to enhance college transfer programs through honors curricula and citations of excellence; (2) the need for promoting various career options in the liberal arts; (3) interdisciplinary approaches such as writing across the curriculum and links between humanities and technology; (4) defining the associate degree; (5) the liberal arts in occupational areas; and (6) student academic support systems. (AYC)

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WAYS OF KNOWING

BY FLORENCE B. BRAWER

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WAYS OF KNOWING

Florence B. Brawer

There are many different ways of knowing about people, institutions, and functions. When it comes to community colleges, knowledge may come from hands on/immediate contact, reviews of the literature, examination of fiscal figures, and/or the interpretation of data. We at the Center for the Study of Community Colleges have been involved in ways of knowing the community college for many years. Since 1974 we have been working specifically on understanding curriculum, students, faculty, and institutional practices that are related to the collegiate function in those institutions.

Let me tell you briefly about what we have done and are doing in order to attain two important and fairly specific goals: to advance the liberal arts in community colleges, and to facilitate student transfer to a four-year college or university or to an occupation of choice. These efforts have entailed the funds from several sources: the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

Under National Endowment for the Humanities' sponsorship, we have conducted a series of surveys to two-year colleges faculty members in order to determine backgrounds, attitudes, and instructional practices. Several thousand instructors have been surveyed during a span of years - 1975, 1977, 1978 - across the nation.

Two smaller cohorts of instructors in Washington State and Los Angeles responded to other surveys dealing with the ways they address their classes and the options they would prefer in order to make their classes more effective. From the Los Angeles Community College District we also have data from students in these same surveyed classes, data that allow comparisons of faculty and student perceptions.

We have also conducted curriculum analyses by counting courses in the liberal arts and comparing these with the other types of courses offered by the various colleges in the sample. Our latest data, which were accrued in Fall 1982, will be presented by Jack Friedlander. I will only note now that the type of material gleaned from surveys of campus facilitators or community service directors and/or faculty provide much information that would be otherwise unattainable.

Some of your colleges are participating in our current survey that is being conducted now again under NEH auspices to update the '75 and '77 series. Although information from these instructional surveys will not be available until this summer, eventually they will be disseminated widely, as are our other findings, through books, through ERIC, and through various other publications.

Another way of knowing about community colleges is through case studies -- insights derived from hands-on examination of what goes on in various institutions and sectors of the colleges. In the 1977-1978 academic year, under NEH auspices, we visited 20 colleges throughout the country in an effort to find out what either inhibited or stimulated activities in the humanities. This material was published in

our Purple Bird, one of our Center monograph series, and further case studies are planned for next fall and winter.

During this current academic year we also have been engaged in other kinds of activities that are geared to strengthening the liberal arts and transfer education in six large urban districts: the City Colleges of Chicago, the Dallas Community College District, the Los Angeles Community College District, the Maricopa Community College District (Phoenix), Miami-Dade College, and St. Louis Community College. Together these six districts comprise 38 separate campuses, and enroll over 335,000 students, a figure that represents fifteen percent of all community college students in the nation.

The major objectives of these projects are to promote exemplary practices in the participating colleges, to stimulate dialogue and communication, to disseminate information, and to provide forums for the exchange of ideas regarding the liberal arts and student programs through the institutions. Accordingly, we have organized and helped conduct a series of workshops in our participating districts. Five workshops have already been held; the sixth will occur in Chicago on May 6th.

These one-day meetings have dealt with various topics. For example, - Los Angeles addressed the issue of Transfer, Honors and Excellence in a meeting at Harbor College in October. Here about 115 people heard about, discussed, and considered ways to enhance transfer to colleges through honors programs and through the citation of excellence for those outstanding students who might welcome some type of encouragement. Les Koltai set the theme for this meeting,

while Bob McCabe of Miami-Dade described procedures to tighten academic standards, rebuild the liberal arts curriculum, and establish interdisciplinary general education courses for all students. He also discussed the testing that is administered to students which forms the basis for placing them in appropriate courses. Admission to specialized courses is restricted until after students have completed the interdisciplinary courses that are prerequisite to those that are specialized.

At this same workshop, John Maguire, President of California's Claremont University Center and Graduate School, discussed the need to improve articulation between public community colleges and private four-year colleges and universities. Maguire listed five reasons for what he termed the abysmal situation with regard to transfer:

(1) At too many community colleges, the institutional message of being a sender of students to four-year colleges and universities gets obscured. (2) The sector that is most capable of receiving the largest number of transfers is the least utilized - namely the independent colleges and universities. Historically, the poorest fit of all has been between public community colleges and private or independent four-year colleges or universities.

(3) The first two years of course work taken in community colleges are rarely designed to fit naturally into years three and four. This is due in part to the poor or nonexistent communication between faculty members in the public community colleges and those in the four-year institutions. (4) Community college students, counselors, and faculty members typically are not aware of the opportunities for

financial aid it has available for students who are prepared to claim it. And (5), the major obstacle to fashioning an articulation system is simply attitude, stereotype, and perception.

Better information is at the top of Maguire's list of prescriptions for strengthening public community colleges and private four-year colleges and universities. The receiving institutions need to supply information to the sending institutions and the senders need to know how to use that information in order to answer such essential questions as: How many students really want to transfer? How many students have the potential to transfer? How many students are being frustrated and denied the opportunity to continue their education beyond grade thirteen or fourteen? Maguire recommended that community college staff identify as early as possible the people who enter their institutions and who really want to go on to earn a baccalaureate degree. These students must be encouraged and supported in every way possible, through better communication, better counseling, and the development of better attitudes.

On December 3rd in St. Louis a workshop was held to examine ways of Addressing the Liberal Arts. The liberal arts, as we knew them years ago, need to be readdressed in community colleges because the forms with which we who went to college in more traditional times and more traditional ways are familiar do not apply to the community college today. We need to look at various career options in the liberal arts - as well as interdisciplinary programs and occupational programs that would include liberal arts offerings. These were discussed in St. Louis. We also need to endorse Work Experience

Liberal Arts Programs (WELAP) which would take the best elements from occupational programs; integrate them with specific courses to enhance literacy in reading, math, and communication; and prepare students to leave the colleges with Associate Degrees that spell out the competencies they have gained.

In January at Maricopa the question of interdisciplinary studies was again addressed. The message received by 70 faculty and administrators from this district was that interdisciplinarity exists in many successful forms in two-year college districts across the nation. From Writing Across the Curriculum, to links between the humanities and technology, to integrative core curriculum - the descriptions were diverse but the common dimension was clear: "faculty are cooperating to offset fragmentation of knowledge and to encourage interconnectedness of the disciplines." Suzanne Richter from Miami-Dade College chaired a mini-workshop on interdisciplinary approaches to the social sciences, while Don Barshis from the City Colleges of Chicago described the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at his institutions. Participants from the other six college districts that are working with us to increase liberal arts offerings and student transfer also discussed interdisciplinary studies at their institutions.

In February, Miami-Dade College examined several broad issues involved in Defining the Associate Degree: the quality of the degree, generalization versus specialization, breadth versus depth, prescriptive versus choice, and competency (course requirements) versus credits. Both Bob McCabe and Jeff Lukenbill emphasized that these issues are important in not only defining the degree per se but in addressing

questions related to what types of courses students must take and what exit competencies they must have when they leave their institution. Suzanne Richter suggested that whatever program is devised, it has to be developed for the majority of people; the AA degree is different from the university freshman and sophomore years. Don Barshis discussed the core courses at Chicago and pointed out that the depth of information that must be retained is such that students should be allowed to test out of courses if they are able to do so. There should be an Associate in Liberal Arts degree which should also include career guidance and program advisement.

Problems in defining the associate degree include course sequencing, and this involves a great deal of study. Some of these were addressed by other panelists: Nancy Armes from Dallas, Ruth Cox from Maricopa, and Steve Curtis from St. Louis. The questions were also raised of curricular tracking, what proceeds what, what prerequisites are necessary, where does one go from A to B? These are issues that Miami-Dade will be addressing in the coming years because they are essential to the formation of their curriculum and to the demands on their students.

The Liberal Arts in Occupational Areas was the main topic of the Dallas workshop, which was held last month at Richland College. Bill Slonecker of Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon, who has developed courses that bridge the occupational areas and the liberal arts, keynoted the day's activities. His courses have been reported in several ERIC documents, and information about other occupational courses which include the arts, sciences, social sciences, and humanities can also be obtained from ERIC.

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On May 6th the City Colleges of Chicago will focus on Student Academic Support Systems. This is the last of our six workshops for this academic year and we are hoping that they will become truly that - workshops that allow faculty and administrative groups to meet and explore issues that are essential to the liberal arts and to transfer education.

Thus, we see that there are various ways of knowing about students, about faculty, about instruction. What do we do with this information? We at the Center have been recommending various activities, some of which Art Cohen will discuss. Many of these activities are being explored in task forces at the colleges, others need to be examined. Only through these attempts at understanding what is going on can we hope to build better curriculum and more effective programs for today's community college students.

I thank you.

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